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ABSTRACT

Recent reforms in social education have emphasized the study of history and global education. Thus, educators expect students to develop historical empathy and the ability to take divergent cultural perspectives. In other words, students should be able to see the world as others see it. From a psychological perspective this capacity is known as perspective consciousness. This paper seeks to develop a theoretical framework for understanding perspective consciousness, so that social educators can make more informed curricular choices. The research in several areas is summarized, and how these studies can help one understand perspective consciousness is discussed. The research into the specific reasoning necessary for understanding the social world is inadequate, and the challenge to incorporate all the ideas with a single design for intense study of perspective consciousness, as defined in social education, remains to be addressed. (DB)

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSPECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

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Perspective Consciousness: A Summary of Rationale

Some recent conceptualizations of social education place history at the center of the study of the human experience (Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 1988; California State Department of Education, 1988; National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 1989). The teaching approach encourages teachers and learners to engage in the imaginative reconstruction of the past. Such reconstruction requires historical empathy, defined as knowledge of what it was like to live in another era by seeing through the eyes of people who were there and understanding why they acted as they did (California State Department of Education, 1988). Students are to study the variety of human experiences across the centuries and among the great cultures of the world (National Commission of Social Studies in the Schools, 1989). Curricular goals include investigation of major religions through time from the point of view of believers, study of art and literature with the sympathy necessary to present the ideas and institutions of civilizations from the inside, and analysis of historical events from the perspective of different groups involved in the events. These recommendations set an intense focus upon interpretation of the human condition as experienced in various settings and times.

Historians are not alone in their recognition of the need to teach understanding of alternate perspectives of reality. Perspective consciousness, defined as empathy with others has often been presented as an essential goal of global education (Becker, 1979; Harvey, 1982; Kniep, 1987). Interpretation limited to the world view conventionally represented in the Western philosophical tradition is no longer regarded as adequate citizenship education for the global era. In the future, citizens of the world

need to somehow understand, or perhaps demonstrate the capacity to adopt, diverse interpretations of social reality.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the psychological propensities and capabilities that are embedded in the abstraction called perspective consciousness. Even though slightly ambiguous, but, nevertheless, delineated competencies reoccur in discussions of perspective consciousness, a coherent research base for direct application to achievement is lacking. Currently, curriculum developers and teachers have to look to partially related theoretical and empirical work to determine and justify their instructional choices. There is a need for intensive analysis of the intellectual and affective constructs embedded in the notion of perspective consciousness in order to develop plans for instruction. This is a report of an initial attempt to clarify this dimension of social education and explore existing knowledge bearing upon learners' successful attainment.

Definition of Perspective Consciousness

The general idea of perspective in social life is commonly explained by reference to what individuals who have attained perspective consciousness should be able to do. That is, the construct is expressed in terms of the operational characteristics that make up a learned ability. The most rigorous definition expects learners to project into others' minds and adopt their world view, thus assuming that it is possible to teach learners to view the world as others view it (Cushner, 1988). To adopt others' worldview, learners must acquire the ability to feel the emotions and think the thoughts of others. Stahl and Chilcoat (1989) use the term sympathetic understanding to discuss intellectual empathy that extends beyond knowledge to include affective association. The position that perspective

consciousness entails affective association, as well as objective cognition, correlates with expectations that the ability to look at the world through others' eyes will enhance acceptance of the universal humanness of all groups (Hanvey, 1982). Even though proponents commonly support the goal of projection into others' minds, some express major reservations about the ease of transcending the cognitive mapping of one's own culture. Even enthusiastic advocates acknowledge that world views are profoundly shaped by influences that escape conscious detection (Anderson, 1982; Hanvey, 1982). Thus, the charge to forsake one world view and adopt another is not regarded as an easy learning task.

Other definitions focus on expectations that are less psychologically demanding. These positions describe perspective consciousness as an expanded awareness and subsequent acceptance of differences in world view. The interpretation does not require learners to adopt a new world view, thereby transcending the cultural assumptions that are considered to be profound psychological traits. Instead, the charges to learners are explained with weaker verbs that emphasize understanding and accepting others rather than attempting to see reality through their eyes. For example, learners should develop a sense of fundamental and profound differences among world views and recognize that their own world view is not universally shared (Anderson, 1982; Hanvey, 1982; Hughes-Wiener, 1988). Learners should both perceive the shared qualities of humanness across cultures, and accept and respect the many manifestations of diversity that distinguish cultures (Kniep, 1987). By comprehending the cosmology of ordinary life (Mazrui, 1987), learners should begin to see others' ways as valid (Cushner, 1988). Learning to understand others should lead to acceptance of their strangeness, but learners need not adopt others' values

to achieve understanding (Kenworthy, 1967). The central theme in these charges to learners is the emphasis upon increased awareness of differences among world views rather than an exhortation to adopt world views other than one's own. It seems to be assumed that a more informed awareness will result in greater acceptance of variation among cultures.

Finally, proponents expect refined consciousness of variation among cultures to result in more insightful and analytical examination of one's own world view. The realization that one's own behavior is affected by cultural background is cited as an indirect benefit of enhanced perspective consciousness (Hughes-Wiener, 1988). Ultimately, individuals with deeply developed perspective consciousness should be able to see themselves through the eyes of those with a different world view (Hanvey, 1982; Kniep, 1987).

Two concerns contribute to the discussion in this paper. First, there is an attempt to outline intellectual and psychosocial operations involved in the process of learning perspective consciousness. Second, relevant findings about what the learner needs to know or be able to do are identified. The substance of this discussion is tentative, because it is derived from an exploratory survey of theoretical models and research that is without precedent. The reviewer's discretion influences conclusions that should be considered speculative at this point.

Intellectual and Psychsocial Operations

Developmental View

The developmentalists' conceptualization of change in cognition through a series of maturational stages has functioned as a persisting explanatory framework in research on learning. The developmental paradigm sets out some limiting conditions. Individuals must be able to reason using

verbal hypotheses, without assistance of concrete event or example, before they can adopt the point of view of an other and foresee implied logical consequences. As a norm, individuals mature to the level of formal cognition around the time of adolescence (Piaget, 1972). An absence of stimulating intellectual conditions in the social environment, and in the acquired experience of the individual, is likely to inhibit progress toward development of the ability to reason about hypothetical circumstances. If perspective consciousness depends upon capacity to reason in the realm of possibilities, then individuals who have not reached the developmental stage of formal cognitive operations will be constrained.

The developmental view of cognition treats young children as essentially egocentric, that is, incapable of taking account of other views. However, some observers of children's behavior have called the conclusions of developmental theory into question (Cox, 1986; Lee, 1989). Observations of very young children, in practical social situations involving people they know, suggest a more liberal interpretation of their capacity for taking account of differences in perspective. Typically, young children adapt their speech when talking to listeners of different ages. In real conversations with familiar others, children show an appreciation of the perspective of the other by adapting their own behavior accordingly. Even before beginning formal schooling, children display ability to recognize that different points of view operate in the social world.

The presumption that perspective consciousness is dependent upon maturation to the stage of hypothetical reasoning, not typical until late childhood or early adolescence, may be far too rigid. An awareness of different perspectives in familiar social interactions is present long before the capacity for representation of others' views in hypothetical terms. The

notion that any manifestation of perspective consciousness awaits development of the appropriate structural level of cognition does not withstand scrutiny. The cognitive developmental view emerged from experiments that required children to conceptualize using physical objects as stimuli. The generalization that young children are socially egocentric may not be a valid inference from performance on perceptual-motor tasks (Lee, 1989).

Moral reasoning, as well as cognitive reasoning, is hypothesized to develop through successive stages. The progressive attainment of levels of principled judgment is described as dependent upon prior advancement to parallel stages of role-taking, or perspective-taking ability (Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh, 1983; Selman & Damon, 1975). Perspective taking, in the moral reasoning theoretical scheme, is conceptualized as an increasing ability to accommodate multiple points of view for the purpose of making decisions that best serve justice. The levels of perspective taking range from a complete lack of awareness of differences in point of view, to the discovery that the intentions of others are distinct from the self's, to the ability to coordinate two conflicting viewpoints and even adopt a third party's position, and finally to take the shared point of view of the generalized other as represented in the individual's society. It is postulated that principled judgment that considers the good of the whole society is dependent upon the advanced cognition necessary for perspective taking. However, sophisticated cognition does not automatically predict that individuals will make judgments based on the greater good of all those concerned or the most laudable societal goal. In sum, while cognitive development may make it possible for an individual to see the world as others see it, their view may still be emotionally rejected. Emotional

identification with others can not be presumed automatic with the adoption of their perspectives. This finding indicates that developmental interpretations of perspective consciousness provide insufficient foundation for planning curriculum and instruction. Attainment of the cognition necessary for advanced perspective taking will not guarantee personal reactions to dissimilar others that are consistent with the altruistic aims of social education.

Constructionist View

The constructivists' view, emerging from analysis of interaction among people, places the stimulation for intellectual operations in social context rather than within cognitive structure. The term verstehen has long represented an objective in sociological study; the ability to understand the behavior of others by being able to share their state of mind (Abel, 1948). The achievement of verstehen is made possible by the internalization of knowledge derived from personal experience in the social world. To share others' state of mind, the learner must be able to internalize observed factors and apply generalizations to make relevant connections between factors. The individual's understanding of others depends upon the amount and quality of personal experience and ability to relate experiences to one another.

Vygotsky (1978) and Luria (1976) continue the verstehen tradition by maintaining that all intellectual operations that require information processing develop as a consequence of participation in society and culture. Luria's investigations, during a period of rapid societal modernization, suggest that transformations in cognition parallel socioeconomic and cultural change and increased participation in formal education. Repeatedly, his nonliterate subjects preferred to reason using data from their

immediate experience and were reluctant to accept data outside their experience or rely upon premises alone. On the other hand, literate individuals with experience in the modern sector were more likely to use new structures of cognitive functioning, such as generalization and abstraction, inference and deduction, and problem solving. Luria's work corroborates the idea that intellectual operations result from internalization of the social context.

Vygotsky interprets the development of higher psychological functions as a two-stage process of, first, social participation in interpersonal activities, and, second, internal reconstruction so that external phenomena become intrapsychic. Individual intellectual development is a consequence of the integration of social symbols, beliefs, and concepts of reality into consciousness. Intellectual capacity is not an exclusive product of internal personal change. This conception of the individual as a reconstructor of experiences suggests that social encounters that present divergent world views is a prerequisite for individual development of perspective consciousness.

Stahl (1989) and Stahl and Casteel (1990) have recently applied the constructivists' interpretation to learning that is commonly enacted in the classroom. They agree that individuals are engaged constantly in the business of inventing their version of the world by constructing their own representations of experience. In school, learners use their previously-stored information to actively transform and generate meanings for new information received during instruction. An additional feature considered in the Stahl analysis is the degree of acceptance that learners assign to new information. Individuals establish the strength of their acceptance of new information by deciding each bits' truth and validity. A strongly-accepted

pool of information becomes a cognitive belief. The greater the strength of a belief, the more the individual uses the information base of the belief to influence acceptance of new information. Learners tend to preserve strong cognitive beliefs and make sense of new information by activating their already-stored and accepted information. In light of this interpretation, an assessment of learners' stored and accepted information becomes essential in planning how to influence their construction of new knowledge.

Propensities of the Learner

In the second part of my discussion, I attempt to review psychological propensities of the learner that are associated with the attainment of perspective consciousness. The substance of the discussion represents an eclectic variety of research literature. Suggestions are derived from the findings of single studies or from compilations that summarize several research reports. Even though there is overlap in the constructs and attributes under investigation in the studies reviewed, the discussion is organized into four sections for presentation purposes: (a) studies that examine children's conceptions of other nations, (b) analyses of negative psychosocial characteristics such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice, (c) description of children's social role-taking ability, and (d) evidence of the influence of acquired background knowledge.

Conception of Other Nations

Summaries of research about children's awareness of and appreciation for other nations and people commonly cite the developmental view as a basic frame of reference for interpretation (Kobus, 1983; Stone, 1986). There is a repeated claim for the existence of age differences in children's conceptions of people in other nations. Despite variation among studies in the labels given to constructs investigated (e.g. attitude,

tolerance), a general pattern in openness toward dissimilar others is cited again and again as an age-related phenomenon. A substantial accumulation of findings points to the conclusion that children are most receptive to learning about other nations and peoples during the period from eight to twelve years of age (Cushner, 1988; Kobus, 1983; Stone, 1986). Around early adolescence, there is an increased tendency to stereotype people in other groups. Before age eight, children are generally in the preoperational cognitive mode that has often been characterized as an egocentric stage of development.

One classical study of children's acceptance of foreign peoples emphasizes the influence of knowledge upon attitude (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967). The researchers interviewed six to fourteen year-olds in several different nations about their views of people in foreign nations. Responses were analyzed to determine the salience of two kinds of content, descriptive and evaluative. The researchers found that children who expressed a friendly orientation toward people of other nations also included more information in their responses that objectively described the foreign groups. That is, those children who apparently had more knowledge about other groups, were less likely to negatively evaluate them or to exaggerate the use of evaluative comments when talking about them.

Psychosocial Characteristics

Division of societies into groups based on ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class, or other factors creates an identification of ingroups and outgroups. The divisions foster judgment of others as similar or dissimilar to oneself based on their group memberships. Variation among people in the intensity of their ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, bias, esteem for others, and general intercultural effectiveness, is an important

consideration in discussions of perspective consciousness. Highly negative attitudes toward outgroups probably pose a serious obstacle to efficacious attainment of perspective consciousness.

The familiar reliance upon developmental stages of cognition and moral reasoning is prominent in the extensive literature that examines factors associated with bias and prejudice (Cushner, 1988; Gay, 1982). Research summaries indicate that individuals at high levels of intellectual development are likely to have the capacity to engage in social perspective taking. In turn, these individuals exhibit less prejudice toward other ethnic groups and more intercultural effectiveness. As mentioned before, cognitive and moral development do not necessarily occur automatically without the support of appropriate learning experiences.

Empirical work indicates clearly that exposure to objective information about other groups is a prerequisite to reduction of prejudice toward those groups (Pate, 1981). A focus on knowledge alone will not always predict change in attitude or behavior, but the reverse expectation, an alleviation of prejudice in the absence of knowledge, is viewed as unrealistic. A seminal study of teenagers' attitudes toward Jewish students in their own high school points out the function that information can serve in the evaluation of an outgroup (Glock, Wuthnow, Allyn, Spencer, 1975). Using a social distance measure, the researchers found a great amount of hostility toward Jews. They reasonably expected that opportunity to know members of the outgroup, because the presence of a large number in the community made acquaintance possible, would result in less hostility. In fact, an opposite pattern was discovered. Many subjects, in particular, those of lower social class, resorted to negative stereotyping by attributing traits to Jewish school mates on the basis of their

membership in an outgroup. The researchers maintained that students varied in ability to explain perceived behaviors with the use of objective information. Those subjects, who were well equipped with accurate information, had the knowledge necessary to explain the historical and social context of the Jewish experience. Uninformed subjects resorted to opinions that associated behavior with membership in an outgroup.

The unsystematic or unintended assimilation of information or attitudes is another important contribution to prejudice and ethnocentrism. Children adopt negative attitudes that are salient in their social environment (Cushner, 1988). Uninformed opinions and distorted information, represented in the media or through social contacts, are available for learning as well as the more objective disciplinary knowledge delivered in school. Cortes and Fleming (1986) found that American children would most like to belong to nations that are publicly presented in a positive light in the U.S. They make a disturbing point by pointing out that children's perceptions of people of other nations is influenced by the foreign policy of their own nation.

It is generally agreed that positive attitude changes can occur as a result of planned intervention strategies (Cushner, 1988). The tendency to react to another culture from the perspective of one's own culture can be brought into awareness for scrutiny and reflection during open discussion in the classroom (Martin, 1985). The potential of university-level learning experiences to enhance ideals of equality and esteem toward social groups is demonstrated by a study involving adolescents and young adults in Canada (Ross & Nagy, 1987). The findings suggest that intellectual exchanges associated with an advanced level of schooling may contribute to greater esteem for different groups.

Social Role Taking

Limited empirical description of children's role-taking characteristics is available in Flavell's (1975) diagnosis based on performance in communication tasks. Different problem situations requiring the subject to infer the needs, intentions, beliefs, and emotional, perceptual or intellectual attributes of another individual were posed to a large variety of children. The tasks were designed to provide indication of children's ability to discriminate the other's perspective in contrived situations. The researchers used developmental psychology as the explanatory framework for interpretation of their findings. They concluded that children's inferences about others' attributes become increasingly more accurate and complex during middle childhood and adolescence. There is no assurance that the cognitive operations tested in the Flavell experiments are specific to role-taking alone or that the operation of role-taking can be isolated as a discrete intellectual skill. However, since performance improved with age, Flavell inferred that the process is developmental.

Even though tasks posed to children in laboratory settings have been carefully planned to expose precisely defined abilities, methodological considerations are constant in psychological research. The naturally occurring interactions of social life are never actually replicated. The developmental pattern may not be easily detected in a random universe where children may choose to engage in encounters that do not exceed their limitations. In addition, Flavell hypothesized that the cognition of role-taking essentially becomes the cognition of problem-solving when the role-taker and the other have markedly different attributes. This would certainly be the case in the social education curriculum. Also, role-takers have to counteract insistent intrusions of their own perspective during

their intellectual search for the other's perspective. When the disparity between perspectives is great, the tendency to revert to the familiar may be more difficult to resist. Despite the fact that Flavell interpreted his findings within the developmental paradigm, he pointed out that role-takers have to rely upon their previous knowledge for reasonable estimation of other's attributes.

Profound cultural differences in the underlying assumptions that make up individuals' conceptions of reality have not been accommodated in laboratory research. The abstractions that compose world view may actually be more influential in the process of learning to take the perspectives of other people than the cognitive structures that have usually been presumed necessary (Damon, 1977). Assumptions suffused in the learner's understanding of the underlying patterns of reality may dominant reasoning in social context, not the cognitive ability displayed in the performance of nonsocial tasks. This observation prompts consideration of the necessity to carefully examine the learner's world view. Perhaps success in taking an unfamiliar perspective should be evaluated in light of the disparities that distinguish the unfamiliar perspective from one's own. Presumably, great differences between perspectives in the implicit assumptions used to explain reality increase the difficulty level of the perspective-taking task.

Background Knowledge

The generative model of learning stipulates that learners construct relations between their own knowledge and past experience and the information to be learned, and, also, among the elements of the material to be learned (Wittrock, 1986). Effective instruction must facilitate the construction of a new conceptual framework from an old preconception.

Learning a new perspective involves relearning or accommodation of a previously learned perspective. In a review of research in social education, Armento (1986) pointed out an emerging interest in how people derive meaning from the social world and how affective and interpersonal components of learning interact with intellectual development. There is a need for extensive research to examine the unique conceptual properties of social knowledge and to identify the psychological processes students employ as they reconstruct images of the social world.

Two recent studies provide initial attempts to characterize students' historical and political knowledge (McKeown & Beck, 1990; Torney-Purta, 1989). McKeown and Beck present a characterization of fifth and sixth graders knowledge of the Revolutionary War period before and after studying the topic in history lessons. The researchers interviewed students using open questions designed to give several opportunities for generation of a coherent image of the role of England in the colonies' struggle for independence and elaboration of ideas about representative government. They reported that students' generated incomplete schema composed of simple associations of ideas and a lack of connected structures and descriptive elaboration. Representations were more complete after students studied the topic, but still not comparable to the researchers' adult expectations of an adequate representation. In contrast to McKeown and Beck's critical evaluation of students' American history schema, Torney-Purta offers a more positive hypothesis about adolescents' knowledge of the international political arena. Representations were evident in the free verbal interchange between students as they worked together in teams to undertake negotiations between nations during a classroom simulation exercise. Torney-Purta suggested that adolescents

possessed definite schema representing their personal construction of the distribution of power among nations. She further suggested that discussion with others during the simulation experience helped students to restructure their ideas.

Conclusion

Social educators expect students to develop historical empathy and ability to take divergent cultural perspectives, that is, to see the world as others see it. The search for a theoretical and empirical foundation reported in this paper confirms that principles directly applicable to the learning task are not codified in available sources. Consequently, the discussion centers on an interpretation of findings and generalizations that offer some partial or related insight into the particular abilities presumed embedded in the taking of alternate perspectives. It should be noted that the discussion is complicated by inability to separate out the distinctions between reasoning for attainment of perspective consciousness and reasoning for accomplishment of slightly different goals. To reiterate, the paucity of investigations into the specific reasoning necessary for understanding of the social world is a serious disadvantage.

It may be concluded from the review of related literature that no single paradigm is sufficiently comprehensive. None provides an all inclusive account of the psychology of perspective consciousness. For example, the developmental view alerts educators to the possibility of age differences, but is not based on learning of social knowledge or learning in social context. While perspective-taking for the purpose of making moral judgments is postulated to develop with advanced levels of cognition, principled decision-making does not assure empathetic acceptance of cultural differences. The constructivists' explanation of learners as

constant generators of meanings, using input from the social world, ascribes power to experience in social surroundings. However, details of schema activation and accommodation of unfamiliar historical and sociocultural information are virtually unexplored. There are differences among individuals in the strength of negative affect toward members of dissimilar groups, but methods of counteracting attitudes can only be suggested; results are not guaranteed. Studies of social role-taking offer incomplete explanation of perspective consciousness, because the problem of substantive differences in world view is not included in analyses.

Despite all the reservations and qualifications, the literature of cognitive psychology invites examination of many intriguing ideas for greater understanding of perspective consciousness. Presently, the challenge to incorporate all the ideas into a single design for intensive study of the specific construct, perspective consciousness, as defined in social education, remains to be addressed.

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